The Obligation of acting according to CONSCIENCE, *especially as to* OATHS.

A

Farewel Sermon,

Preached *JAN.* 22. 171$\frac{5}{6}$.

Price 4 *d.*

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III
BRITISH MUSEUM

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Farewel SERMON

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JAN. 22. 171$\frac{5}{6}$.

Θεὸν ἐπορκῶν μὴ δόκει λελῆθέναι.

LONDON,

Printed for J. ROBERTS, at the *Oxford-Arms* in *Warwick-Lane*. 1716.

PREFACE.

THE Number of Thoſe, who have lately declined the Oaths, and relinquiſhed their Preferments, being very ſmall, they have the Misfortune to be looked upon as a few obſtinate, opinionative Perſons. But, if after the moſt impartial Examination, theſe Men have not been able to ſatisfy themſelves; their greateſt Enemies muſt allow, that they have acted as they ought to have done. And to ſhew that they were obliged in Conſcience to this Conduct, was the Deſign of the following Diſcourſe; which is now publiſhed as an Apology

for them. In which no Defence at all of their Political Principles is undertaken, but only of their Practice.

The Performances of Thoſe who have written lately in Behalf of the Oaths, *have not been able to give them any manner of Satisfaction; Two of which it will not be improper here to take notice of.*

The Firſt is, A Letter from a Clergyman in *London, &c.* to a Clergyman in the *Country, &c. Wherein the Author has only made a Collection out of Dr.* Higden's View and Defence; *which had been at large baffled and refuted by a* Gentleman; *to whom the* Doctor *never made the leaſt Reply. If the Writer of the* Letter *did not know This, his Ignorance is inexcuſable; if he did, he is guilty of Somewhat worſe than Ignorance. And Here One cannot but wonder a little at the late quick Sale of*

of the Doctor's *Book; which has been ſo great, as to incourage the Bookſeller to put out a New Edition. But the Reflexion, natural on this Occaſion, ſhall be forborn.*

The other Pamphlet is called, King George's Title Aſſerted. *In this the Author lays down a Thing, which, according to himſelf, was and is* Doubtful, *as the Foundation of his whole Argument. And afterwards, having mentioned the ſeveral Schemes of* Deſertion, Conqueſt, *and* Poſſeſſion, *he from one, or all of theſe together, infers the Right of the preſent Settlement. 'Tis ſtrange, that Men ſhould reject the Popular Scheme of Government, with ſuch Contempt; and yet, in their own Defence, be forced to have Recourſe to Things ſo inconſiſtent with one another.*

Theſe different Schemes cannot but ſuggeſt one Obſervation, which will take

take away the moſt common Objection againſt the Non-jurors, *viz. The great Majority of Thoſe of a contrary Perſuaſion. For there is no Man who has taken the Oaths, in what Notion ſoever, who has not a very great Majority of Perſons againſt him, who have taken them in a Sence altogether different from His. So that, in this Reſpect, both* Jurors *and* Non-jurors *ſtand upon equal Ground.*

Lately Publiſhed by the ſame AUTHOR:

A Diſcourſe concerning the Nature and Obligation of *Oaths*, wherein All the Caſes which have any Relation to *Oaths* injoined by Governments, are briefly conſidered. Printed for *J. Roberts* at the *Oxford-Arms* in *Warwick-Lane*. Price One Shilling.

The Obligation of acting according to *Conſcience*, eſpecially as to OATHS.

ROM. xiv. 23. (latter part.)

----- *Whatſoever is not of Faith, is Sin.*

AMONG thoſe who had been newly converted from *Judaiſm* to *Chriſtianity*, there were many *weak* Brethren, who retained a Reverence for the Ceremonial Law, as ſuppoſing it ſtill in Force; and accordingly *obſerved* the Difference of *Days* and *Meats* preſcribed by it. Whereas Thoſe, who, being more confirmed in the Knowledge of their Religion, were fully ſatisfied that *Chriſt* had delivered them from their Bondage to that Law, intirely neglected the Obſervation of *Days* injoined by it, and eat promiſcu-

miſcuouſly of any Kind of *Meats*. Theſe different Opinions and Practices had occaſioned ſome Diſturbance in the Church. For the Former Sort of Converts, were offended and ſcandalized at the Liberty taken by the Latter, and paſſed unjuſt Cenſures upon it; and the Latter deſpiſed the Weakneſs and Ignorance of the Former.

To remedy this Inconvenience, was the Apoſtle's Deſign in this Chapter; in which he adviſes the One to lay aſide their raſh Judgments, and the Other to uſe their Chriſtian Liberty more cautiouſly, ſo as not to give any Offence or Occaſion of Sin. And tho' he declares it to be in itſelf Lawful for Chriſtians to eat any Kind of Meats, prohibited as *unclean* by the *Moſaic* Law; yet at the ſame time he aſſures them, that it was Unlawful for any Man to eat of ſuch Meats, who either *eſteemed* them *to be unclean*, or only *doubted* whether they were ſo, or not. *I know, and am perſuaded by the Lord Jeſus, that there is nothing* † *unclean of itſelf: but to him that eſteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him* it is *unclean. And he that doubteth, is damned* [or ſelf-condemned] *if he eat, becauſe* he eateth *not of Faith.* And this he proves by the Aphoriſm or General Rule in the Text, *Whatſoever is not of Faith, is Sin.*

—*Ver.* 14. † Gr. *common.*

—*Ver.* 23.

In which Words, by *Faith*, is plainly meant a rational Perſuaſion concerning the Lawfulneſs of any Action. Not a full Perſuaſion, ariſing from infallible Proof and Demonſtration, which

which in moſt Caſes is not to be attained: but ſuch a Perſuaſion only, as is grounded upon probable and moral Certainty, where the Arguments for the Lawfulneſs of a Thing are more or ſtronger than thoſe againſt it; in which Sence it is taken three times in this and the foregoing Verſe. And this is exactly agreeable to the original † Word, which, in its primary and native Signification, denotes a Perſuaſion of Mind; in which all Kinds of Faith whatſoever do conſiſt, and without which there can be no ſuch Thing.

† Πίστις, from Πείθω *perſuadeo.* Bp. *Saunderſon.*

The Doctrine here laid down by the Apoſtle is this, That either a real Opinion that a Thing is Unlawful, or the bare Doubtfulneſs or Suſpenſion of a Man's Judgment about it, is alone ſufficient to render it Unlawful to Him. Which he proves in the following Method. "Whatſo-
" ever a Man really thinks Unlawful, or con-
" cerning the Lawfulneſs of which he is in
" Doubt, That he ought not to do, and is
" Self-condemned if he venture upon it. Be-
" cauſe, Whatſoever is done under ſuch Opi-
" nion or Doubtfulneſs, does not proceed from
" a Perſuaſion that it is Lawful. And What-
" ſoever a Man does, without being perſuaded
" of its Lawfulneſs, is a Sin.

The Firſt Thing to be inquired into, in order fully to underſtand this Rule, is, Whence this Perſuaſion of Mind hath ſo great Authority,

as to render whatſoever is not according to it, a Sin.

The Underſtanding, is that Faculty, with which God has indowed the Soul of Man to guide and direct him in all which he is to do. To qualify it for this Office, God has been pleaſed to communicate to it the Knowledge of his Will, in the Law of Nature, and in his Written Word; which are the Two ſtanding Rules of Human Actions. It is the Buſineſs of the Underſtanding to apply theſe Rules to particular Actions, and thereby diſcover their Lawfulneſs or Unlawfulneſs. And this Power or Habit of the Underſtanding is that which is properly called *Conſcience*.

Now the Perſuaſion, which ariſes from the Exerciſe of this Power, ought to determine a Man in the doing or forbearing any thing. For, the Lawfulneſs or Unlawfulneſs of any Action, depends upon its being agreeable or contrary to the Law of God, either Natural or Revealed: It cannot be known, whether any Action be either agreeable or diſagreeable to theſe Laws, but by comparing it with them: And this cannot be done, but by the Exerciſe of that Power of the Underſtanding called *Conſcience*. This therefore is, by the Appointment of God, the Interpreter of his Will to every particular Perſon; and ought therefore to be attentively hearkened unto, as delivering the Mind and Pleaſure of God. It is his Vice-gerent in the Soul, declaring what is either injoined, or permitted, or forbidden,

bidden, by the Divine Law; and having a Commiſſion from God to do this, it is in every thing to be intirely ſubmitted to. And therefore, as to comply with the Dictates of it, is to acknowledge the Authority of God: ſo, to act contrary to them, is to act in Defiance of God Himſelf.

So that the Judgment or Perſuaſion of *Conſcience*, can make That, which is in itſelf either a Neceſſary Duty or a Thing Indifferent, to become Unlawful. Not Unlawful in itſelf, for Opinions cannot alter the Nature of Things; but Unlawful only to him who thinks it ſo. But then this will not hold on the Contrary, as to Things Unlawful in themſelves; no Perſuaſion of a Man's Mind that they are Lawful, can make them ſo to Him. The Reaſon of which Difference is, that one Defect alone is ſufficient to render an Action evil, tho' the Subſtance of it be Good, and therefore a wrong Intention will do it of itſelf: but there muſt be a Concurrence of all due Cauſes and Circumſtances to make an Action Good, and conſequently a right Deſign or Intention alone will not ſuffice.

From what has been here laid down, a Man may perhaps imagine, that before every Action, it is neceſſary to examine whether it be Lawful or not. But ſome Actions are ſo ſmall and trivial, that the Underſtanding immediately and at firſt Sight determines concerning them. Such are all the Actions of common Life, which may

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and ought to be done without any formal Deliberation; which would here be trifling and ridiculous. An actual Conſideration therefore is required only in Things of an higher Nature and of greater Conſequence; in which it very often happens, that we cannot be rationally perſuaded that they are fit to be done, without a diſtinct Examination of them.

This being premiſed concerning the Power and Authority of *Conſcience*; let us next inquire, How far this General Rule extends, and with what Reſtriction it is to be underſtood.

And here, ſince the Apoſtle mentions Two things as different from that Faith or Perſuaſion, without which every Action is a Sin, namely, an Opinion that it is Unlawful, and a Doubtfulneſs whether it be Lawful or not; it will be neceſſary to conſider, whether Both theſe equally oblige us to forbear any Action. And ſince all Actions are in themſelves either Unlawful, or Neceſſary, or Indifferent, I ſhall particularly, tho' briefly, examine, What Influence either this Opinion, or this Doubtfulneſs, ought to have in reſpect of Each.

As to Actions *Unlawful* in themſelves, as being forbidden by the Law of God, we ſin grievouſly, if either believing them ſuch, or only doubting concerning them, we yet venture upon them. There can be no greater Contempt of the Divine Majeſty ſhewed, than by doing thoſe Things which we are perſuaded

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ed will offend him. This is the higheſt Degree of Preſumption imaginable. And the next to This is, to do thoſe Things, which we have as much reaſon to think will offend him, as that they will not.

As to *Neceſſary* Actions, ſuch as we are commanded to do by the Law of God, if, thro' a ſtrange Miſtake, we ſhould think them forbidden, we are obliged not to do them, and yet we are guilty of Sin in leaving them undone. So that in this Caſe, a Man is brought under a fatal Neceſſity of ſinning: For if he do the Thing contrary to the Perſuaſion of his Mind, he does it under the Notion of Evil, and therefore ſins; and if he do it not, he likewiſe ſins, by neglecting a neceſſary Duty. This is a Caſe which ſeldom happens; but becauſe it ſtill proceeds from a criminal Ignorance, from a Man's having not improved thoſe Means and Opportunies of knowing better which have been afforded him, he is juſtly puniſhable for his Error.—— If a Man only doubt whether ſuch a Thing be forbidden or not, he is to forbear doing it for the preſent, but muſt immediately apply himſelf to ſome Perſon upon whoſe Judgment he may ſafely depend, and determine himſelf according to it.

As to Things in their own Nature *Indifferent*, ſuch as are neither commanded nor forbidden by the Divine Law, if a Man really believe any of them to be Unlawful, he cannot do it without Sin. The Dictate of an erroneous

ous Conſcience, in this, as in the former Caſe, obliging him to forbear every Action contrary to it; which, tho' it cannot be done, may yet be left undone, without Sin. But This is to be underſtood, ſuppoſing the Man to be intirely in his own Power, and free from any Command about it. For if Lawful Authority has interpoſed, and injoined the Obſervation of any ſuch Thing, a Man is not left to his Liberty to chooſe whether he will do it or not: But is reduced to the like fatal Neceſſity with that mentioned before. He ſins, either by acting againſt the Perſuaſion of his Conſcience, or by diſobeying Lawful Authority, to which the Divine Precept commands him to be ſubject. The only Way he has to take, is, to be jealous of his own Opinion, to examine the Grounds and Foundation of it with the utmoſt Care himſelf, and to take the Advice of One, in whoſe Skill and Impartiality he may ſafely confide. For to do it, directly contrary to the Judgment of his own Mind, he muſt not adventure upon any Account whatſoever.

The Expediency likewiſe of Things Indifferent is to be conſidered. For tho' a Man be not under any Human Command concerning them, and ſo may have Power to uſe or not to uſe them: Yet, if he be not perſuaded that they are Expedient as well as Lawful, he is bound to abſtain from them. For Charity obliges him not to do any thing, which may *put a Stumbling-block, or an Occaſion to fall in his*

—*Ver.* 13, 20, 21.

his Brother's Way. But if Lawful Governors have appointed ſuch Things to be obſerved, tho' he ſhould not think them Expedient, yet he ought to do them; becauſe They, and not Private Perſons, are the proper Judges of Expedience. And whatever Offence or Scandal ſuch Actions may cauſe, They who injoin them muſt anſwer for it. The Perſon, who, out of a Principle of Obedience, does what he is commanded, is ſufficiently juſtified, though he do not think it Expedient, provided he do not think it Unlawful.

But the Caſe of Doubtfulneſs in Things of this Nature, is very different from That of a real Opinion of their Unlawfulneſs; and is next to be examined. If a Man, who lies under no Obligation from the Commands of of his Superiors, as to any particular Thing which is Indifferent, only doubt whether it be Lawful or not, he is bound to forbear doing it, and is ſelf-condemned if he act otherwiſe. Becauſe, being at full Liberty either to do or let it alone, he is certain not to ſin if he ſit ſtill; whereas, by venturing upon the Action, he does That, about which he is not ſufficiently informed, and which he has as much Reaſon to believe Unlawful as not. He declines the Judgment of his own Conſcience, by which he ought to be guided in every Thing; and without any Perſuaſion of the Lawfulneſs of What he is about to do, raſhly and preſumptuouſly ingages in it.

This was the Caſe of the Perſons ſpoken of in this Chapter, who were under no manner of Reſtraint from Human Authority, as to *Days* or *Meats* diſtinguiſhed by the Jewiſh Law, from which Chriſt had intirely ſet them free. And therefore they might have either obſerved or neglected ſuch Days, either eaten or abſtained from ſuch Meats; being under no Law but That of Charity concerning them. In reſpect of Theſe, and of Perſons in the like Circumſtances, the Apoſtle's Declaration is to be underſtood, *He that doubteth, is damned if he eat.* He who doubteth of the Lawfulneſs of any Thing in itſelf Indifferent, and which no Authority has commanded to be done, is ſelf-condemned if he do it: And This for the Reaſon juſt now given.

—*Ver.* 23.

To apply the Apoſtle's Words, as the *Diſſenters* do, to the Rites and Ceremonies injoined in our Church, and from hence to make the Doubts of Private Perſons concerning their Lawfulneſs, a ſufficient Ground for refuſing to obſerve them, is to pervert and abuſe Scripture. For Here both Eccleſiaſtical and Civil Governors have interpoſed; whereas There neither of them had in the leaſt concerned themſelves. And where there is ſo great a Diſparity in the Caſes, a Rule which was good as to the One, is of no Force in Relation to the Other.

Other. The taking thoſe Places of Scripture, which were wrote on particular Occaſions, and adapted to the State of Things, and the Circumſtances of Thoſe to whom they were directed, and applying them equally to all Times and Perſons, has been the Occaſion of moſt of thoſe Errors which have in all Ages diſturbed the Peace of the Church. In particular, that unreaſonable Schiſm, which has ſo long infeſted this Nation, and involved us in ſo much Blood and Confuſion, is chiefly owing to thoſe wrong Interpretations and Applications of Scripture, which proceeded at firſt from Ignorance, but have been adhered to out of Obſtinacy and Perverſeneſs.

The true State of the Matter before us is this. If our Governors in Church or State injoin any Thing, which does not appear to be Unlawful from any plain Evidence of Reaſon or Text of Scripture, tho' a Man doubt of its Lawfulneſs, yet he is obliged to obſerve it. Becauſe ſuch Things as are in their own Nature Indifferent, being neither preſcribed nor forbidden by the Natural or Revealed Law, are the proper Objects of Human Authority; as being the only Things left by God to be determined ſolely by it. And if in ſuch Things, Men refuſe to be guided by their Superiors, they contemn that Authority, which in the Word of God they

are commanded to obey; and are conſequently guilty of a very great and heinous Sin.

Motus indifferens in utramque partem Contradictionis.

For Men to plead, that it is againſt their Conſcience to do a Thing which they own to be in itſelf Indifferent, becauſe they doubt whether they may lawfully do it or not, is to plead That which is falſe and abſurd. For Doubtfulneſs is as much according to Conſcience, as it is againſt it; it being the Suſpenſion of the Mind between two Opinions, when the Arguments on both Sides appear ſo equal, that the Judgment inclines firſt one Way, then the other, 'till at laſt it hangs in a perfect *Æquilibrio*. Juſt as the Scales of a Balance when the Weight is equal, riſe and ſink by Turns, and then ſtand exactly even. In which Caſe, Human Authority, if it will not turn the Scale, muſt be one of the lighteſt Things imaginable.

A Repugnant, and a Doubting Conſcience, are two very different Things. Whatſoever the Conſcience declares to be Unlawful, and contradicts and oppoſes the doing of, ought not to be done, at the Command of any Perſon, or upon any other Motive, it being directly againſt Conſcience. But That, concerning the Unlawfulneſs of which the Conſcience only doubts, is no more againſt Conſcience than with it. And if it be a Thing

Thing in its own Nature Indifferent, and injoined by Lawful Superiors, it cannot with a good Conſcience be refuſed. It being Certain, that in ſuch Things Authority is to be obeyed; but very Uncertain, whether the Doubts of Private Perſons can in the leaſt excuſe their Diſobedience. And therefore it is much the ſafer Way, to yield, than to deny Obedience, doubtingly. And ſhould any Evil happen to be the Conſequence of it, They who impoſe it, and not They who ſubmiſſively comply with it, are accountable for it.

Having thus ſtated the Doctrine, and explained the General Rule here laid down by the Apoſtle, I ſhall now briefly apply What has been ſaid to the Caſe of Swearing.

To ſwear *in Truth, in Judgment, and in Righteouſneſs*, is an Act of Religious Worſhip injoined by God; which therefore we are obliged to perform, when called to do it by Lawful Authority. This being a neceſſary Duty, an erroneous Perſuaſion or Doubt that it is forbidden, will not juſtify us in refuſing to do it; but we are guilty of Sin both Ways, either by doing or refuſing, for the Reaſon above given. Jer. iv. 2.

To ſwear *Falſely*, *Ignorantly*, or *Unjuſtly*, is a Thing in it ſelf Unlawful, being expreſsly forbidden by the Law of God. And therefore no Human Authority can oblige a Man to it;

it; nor can any falſe Opinion of its Lawfulneſs on any Occaſion, much leſs can any Doubtfulneſs about it, excuſe him in doing it.

As to Swearing *Ignorantly* or *Unjuſtly*, I ſhall not at preſent ſay any Thing more, but ſhall add a few Words only concerning Swearing *Falſely*.——— All Oaths impoſed by Governors, are to be taken according to the plain and common Sence of the Words, which is intended by thoſe Governors. The very End and Deſign of every ſuch Oath is to give them Aſſurance of the Reality of the Sentiments and Promiſes of Him who takes it. Of which it cannot poſſibly give any Aſſurance, if the Words are underſtood in one Sence by Himſelf, and in another by Thoſe to whom it is taken. Where therefore a Man is required to ſwear, That he believes in his Conſcience that ſuch a Thing is ſo; if he take this Oath, and do not believe in his Conſcience that it is ſo, in that very Sence which the Impoſers deſign, he ſwears Falſely. Nay, if a Man only doubt whether the Thing be ſo or not, his Oath is falſe. For tho', as was ſaid above, Doubtfulneſs is no more againſt Conſcience than with it, yet it is indeed neither: And therefore for a Man to ſay that he believes in his Conſcience the Truth of That of which he doubts, is to ſay What is falſe; and conſequently, to ſwear it, is Perjury.

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In the *Oaths* injoined at this Time, we are to ſwear, that we believe in our Conſciences the Truth of ſeveral Particulars therein declared. And therefore the only Thing which a Man has to do, is to examine whether he believes it or not; which is fully in his own Power to know. For if he either believes any of them to be falſe, or doubts of their Truth, be they really never ſo true in themſelves, he muſt neceſſarily be perjured in ſwearing that he believes them to be true. If then a Man is not ſatisfied in this Matter, he ought to decline the Oaths, let the Conſequence be what it will.

But ſince moſt Perſons have now taken theſe Oaths; and ſince it is certain, that Many do not believe the Truth of every Thing contained in them: It will be proper, briefly to conſider What is moſt plauſibly urged by Way of Excuſe, by Thoſe who have taken them, and yet are ready to own themſelves not altogether perſuaded that every part of them is true. All which may be reduced to Three Heads, The Judgment of the Learned, The Example of the Pious, and The ſad Conſequence of a Refuſal.

I. The general Judgment of the moſt Learned Perſons, concerning the Lawfulneſs of theſe Oaths. Truth, being of an unchangeable Nature, does not depend on the Opinions of Men.

Men. Neither the Number, nor the Learning of thoſe who maintain or oppoſe it, can make any real Alteration in it. Tho' Learning is indeed a great Help towards the Diſcovery of it, yet it is not an infallible Guide. And if temporal Intereſt happen to come in the Way, Learning is very often drawn aſide by it, and becomes as blind a Guide as Ignorance itſelf. And therefore the Opinions of Learned Men, which ſo frequently miſlead themſelves, cannot poſſibly be the adequate Rule of another's Conſcience. And conſequently, they are not ſufficient to warrant a Man in doing any Thing, unleſs he is convinced by the Reaſons which ſupport thoſe Opinions; and then they become his own. Otherwiſe the bare Affirmations of the greateſt Scholars, eſpecially when ſubſervient to a preſent Intereſt, are by no means to be relied on.

The great Argument brought againſt our Bleſſed Saviour, was, that none of the Rulers, Chief Prieſts, Scribes, or Phariſees, the great and learned Men of the Nation, had declared for him, and that only the inferiour ignorant ſort of People had joined with him. *Have any of the Rulers, or of the Phariſees believed on him? But this People who knoweth not the Law are curſed.* The People, it ſeems, did not underſtand the Law ſufficiently, to know who was the true *Meſſias*. Where, under the Term *Law*, theſe grave Senators no doubt comprehended

Joh. vii. 48, 49.

hended all the modern Comments and Traditions of their Rabbies, which they had advanced to an equal Authority with the Scriptures. For the Old Law, contained in theſe, plainly enough pointed out *Jeſus Chriſt* as the True Meſſias; but the New Additional Law directed the Eyes and Expectations of Men another Way. And by This, theſe unauthoriſed Legiſlators had, as much as in them lay, endeavoured to repeal and invalidate the true genuin Law of God himſelf. Mat. xv. 6.

And as, in this Caſe, the illiterate and well-meaning People were in the Right, by going contrary to the Opinion of their Learned Governors: So thoſe poor deluded Wretches were miſerably in the Wrong, who, at the Direction of their *Chief Prieſts* and *Elders*, the Great Council or *Sanhedrin*, cried out, *Not this Man, but Barabbas.* Joh. xviii. 40.

But in the Caſe before us, the Judgment of Learned Men, tho' in the Right, is not of ſufficient Authority to influence Others. For what ſignify the Opinions of the Learned, even grounded on juſt Reaſons, when a Man is required to ſwear according to his own Belief? And if a Man ſwears, that he believes in his Conſcience a Thing which he really does not; is it any Vindication of himſelf, to ſay, that many Learned Men believed it, and were of Opinion, that he might and ought to have believed it alſo?

II. The Example of many Good and Pious Men who have taken theſe *Oaths*. No Example of any Perſon whatever is to be followed, unleſs it be conformable to the Precepts of Religion. By this Rule we are to judge of the Actions of Others, as well as of our own. And one Reaſon, no doubt, why the Failings of Holy Men are ſo frequently related in Scripture, is, to warn us, not to imitate the Beſt of Men in all Things, but only in ſuch as we are convinced they ought to have done.

St. *Peter*'s Profeſſions of Fidelity to his Maſter, were in themſelves very commendable. *Tho' all Men ſhall be offended becauſe of Thee, yet will I never be offended. Tho' I ſhould die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee.* Theſe were the Expreſſions of an ardent Love and Heroic Reſolution; and fit to be repeated by all the Diſciples of the ſame Lord. But ſee the Frailty and Infirmity of Human Nature! This Perſon, the very ſame Night, out of Fear of Suffering, denies and abjures his Maſter. Now becauſe the Example of St. *Peter* is proper to be followed in his Profeſſions of Duty, will it therefore be at all excuſable to follow it in his Denial and Perjury?

Mat. xxvi. 33, 35.

When That which Good Men do, is apparently for their preſent Advantage, and ſecures them from great Inconveniences, tho' poſſibly

poſſibly they may act ſincerely according to their real Sentiments; yet, unleſs the Reaſons upon which they proceed are known, other Perſons cannot diſcover, whether Principle or Intereſt was moſt prevalent. Nay, in the Opinion of a very great Divine, *If* a Man *judges in Compliance with his Temporal Regards, He himſelf cannot be confident, but that he was moved, not by the prevailing Reaſon, but by prevailing Paſſion.* But eſpecially, when What Men do, ſeems directly contrary to their former Principles, There the Reaſons of their Practice ought to be made as public as their Principles have been. Otherwiſe, their Example, which, for any Thing appears to the contrary, is grounded only on Intereſt, can be no Manner of Direction to Others.

Dr. *Taylor's Doctrine and Practice of Repentance.* Ch. 1. § 2.

But Here, as was obſerved juſt now, a Man being to ſwear that he believes in his Conſcience the Truth of ſuch a particular Thing, the Example of the beſt Perſons in the World who have ſworn to the ſame, ought not of itſelf to be any Inducement to Him. For if he does not believe What he ſwears, is he not plainly perjured? And if he be, is it any Excuſe to ſay, that he followed the Example of many Good Men, who perhaps really ſwore according to their Belief; whereas, by his own Confeſſion, he himſelf did not?

And before I conclude this Head, I think it neceſſary, in order to take off the Imputation of Singularity, to declare, that I was in Hopes I ſhould have been able to have retorted theſe Two Objections, by unexceptionable Inſtances in theſe Parts. For had Several of thoſe Learned and Good Men, whoſe Sentiments I took Care to inform myſelf of, acted, as they ſeemed reſolved to do about Three Months ago, I ſhould not have appeared Here almoſt alone in this Matter. —— I will not cenſure or condemn them, but ſhall only obſerve, That if They have now taken the *Oaths* with a good Conſcience, I am certain that I have declined them with as good, and have given at leaſt a more evident Proof of it; and in this one Reſpect am more ſecure than They, in that I run no Riſque at all of being Perjured.

III. The Third and laſt Thing urged by way of Excuſe, is, the ſad Conſequences of refuſing the *Oaths*, namely, the Loſs of Temporal Conveniences, and the Ruin of a Man's Self and Family. —— If That which is required to be ſworn, be directly contrary to the Perſuaſion of a Man's own Mind, this Objection is of no more Weight than either of the former. The wilful Commiſſion of any one deliberate Sin, much more the ſolemn Invocation of God to witneſs a Lie,

Lie, muſt not be ventured upon, to ſecure the Poſſeſſion of any Thing here Below, or for the Sake of the Deareſt Perſon upon Earth.

The Generality of Perſons are ready enough to own their Belief of the Divine Providence; but are ſeldom willing to truſt to it. That God can ſpread a Table in the Wilderneſs, they make no Queſtion; yet ſtill, for Fear he ſhould not, they will do almoſt any Thing to provide for themſelves. But, One would think, the beſt Way to ſecure the Care of Providence, without which a Man cannot but be miſerable, is, not to offend God. I am ſure our Bleſſed Saviour has given us this Direction, *Seek ye* Mat. vi. 33. *firſt the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs, and all theſe Things ſhall be added unto you.*

But ſuppoſe it certain, that either a Man muſt ſwear contrary to his Conſcience, or elſe He and his Family muſt be reduced to the extreameſt Neceſſity; Is it at all diſputable, which Part he ought to chooſe? May he prevent his Misfortunes by his Wickedneſs? Has not our Bleſſed Maſter put this very Caſe? *He that loveth* Mat. x. 37, 38. *Father or Mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and He that loveth Son or Daughter more than me, is not worthy of me. And He that taketh not his Croſs, and follow-*

followeth after me, is not worthy of me.

Luke xiv. 26. *If any Man come to me, and hate not his Father, and Mother, and Wife, and Children, and Brethren, and Siſters, yea and his own Life alſo, he cannot be my Diſciple.* Whoever is not ready to part with all theſe Things, rather than wilfully and deliberately to act againſt his Conſcience, cannot have Chriſt for his Maſter and Saviour.

To what Purpoſe are all the Precepts in the Goſpel concerning Self-denial and Suffering, if theſe very Things may be brought as Objections againſt following the Dictate of Conſcience? What is This, but to object one Duty againſt another, in order to render Both unneceſſary? From ſuch Objections, One would imagin, that thoſe who make them look upon the Acting ſincerely according to Conſcience, as proper only when a Man can get, or at leaſt not loſe any Thing by ſo doing. But, as Chriſtianity is properly the Religion of the Croſs, upon the Account of the Sufferings of its Author; ſo He has expreſsly required of all his Diſciples a Conformity to his Example, in this as well as other Reſpects. *If any Man will come after me, let him deny himſelf, and take up his Croſs, and follow me.* Whoever therefore is not prepared to ſuffer, rather than ſwear falſely, has not, at Preſent,

Mat. xvi. 24.

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Chriſtianity enough to be ſaved, whatever he may attain to hereafter.

And now to Conclude this Diſcourſe, and with it my Miniſtry amongſt You. —— Since I am obliged ſo ſoon to leave you, I heartily wiſh, that my Place may be ſupplied by One, whoſe Labours for your Good may be more conſtant, and attended with better Succeſs. For my own Part, I have, both in the Diſcharge of my Office, and in the Conduct of my Life, endeavoured to act according to my Character; and in whatever I have failed, it has proceeded from Human Infirmity alone, and never from any wilful deliberate Purpoſe of doing amiſs. That Zeal for the Church of *England*, which I have ſhewn in the narrow Sphere in which the Divine Providence had placed me, is ſo far from giving me any Regret, tho' I am likely to ſuffer for it, that it really affords me the greateſt Satisfaction. And I cannot but remember, with Comfort, my hearty tho' weak Endeavours, to vindicate her Doctrine and Worſhip, againſt Papiſts on one Hand, and Fanatics on the other; by the laſt of whom She has been ſo much inſulted and abuſed of late. And whatever Inconvenience I may be expoſed to on this Account, the grateful Reflexion upon my own Sincerity

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in what I have done, will, by the Help of God, enable me to undergo it.——— As I have hitherto, in ſome meaſure, I truſt, approved my ſelf as the Miniſter of God in Proſperity: So I ſhall, for the Future, endeavour to do the ſame, *in Afflictions, in Neceſſities, in Diſtreſſes; by Diſhonour* as well as *Honour, by evil* as well as *good Report, as a Deceiver and yet true:* To which I hope I may likewiſe add, *as Sorrowful, yet alway Rejoicing, —— as having nothing, and yet poſſeſſing all Things.*

FINIS.